later, Homma was executed by an Army firing squad.

Robert Pelz, now 88, is the last surviving member of Homma's legal defense team. He believes Homma did not receive a fair trial. But that doesn't mean he was morally innocent. "I'm convinced that he was not aware" of the atrocities, Pelz says, but "as the military commander he *should* have known." Brilliant, well educated, and patrician, "he should have sought out that intelligence. He of all people."

HISTORY

The Shining Factory Upon a Hill

THE SOURCE: "Beyond 'Voting With Their Feet': Toward a Conceptual History of 'America' in European Migrant Sending Communities, 1860s to 1914" by Max Paul Friedman, in ***Journal of Social History***, Spring 2007.

OVER THE CENTURIES, THE European peasants who stayed behind when their neighbors boarded ships for America developed strong views about the New World: It was a distant, rough, demanding land. People could get lucky and strike it rich. Quite a few would give up in disgust and come back with a bad attitude. Refinement would be lost, morals often undermined. America as a society was "immediate and present" to ordinary Europeans, writes Max Paul Friedman, a historian at American University. Letters, songs, games, slang, epithets, dictionaries, even place names flesh out a "history of concepts" about the United States that were remark-

EXCERPT

Legacy of the Frontier

We came as pioneers, we worked extremely hard, for a time we prospered; then the old folks died and their children died; little by little the hard-acquired land got sold and vanished, making it a close question as to what exactly we won. Strong lives, I suppose.

—**LARRY MCMURTRY**, author of 29 novels and other works about the American West, quoted by Hillsdale College vice president Douglas A. Jeffrey in ***Claremont Review of Books*** (Spring 2007)

This sod house on the North Dakota prairie sheltered John and Marget Bakken and their children, Tilda and Eddie, shown here about 1896.

ably detailed, and which shifted from place to place and in time.

Most commonly, America was seen as remote. In the German grand duchy of Hesse, the field furthest from the house was called the *Amerika-feld*. A town in Bohemia was nicknamed *Amerika* because flooding often cut it off from nearby villages. A farmer in Mecklenburg might be teased about "trying to get to America" when he plowed an especially deep furrow.

A sleeping person might be said to inhabit *Kamerika*, someone packed off to jail might be described as being *nah Amerika*. Columbus's discovery was occasionally an oath or a threat: *Geh af Amerika!*—go to hell. A parent in Klentnitz might say to a naughty child, "Do you want to see America?"

Children's counting rhymes, marble games, and hide-and-seek all referred to going to America. In many parts of Italy, to find one's America meant to strike it rich. Figures of speech sometimes contained an element of defiance. In Hesse, *Er hodd hie Amerika funn* meant that somebody got rich right in Hesse and didn't need to go to America to succeed.

Communities that had undergone high rates of migration knew that making it in America was a struggle and not always a genteel pursuit, Friedman says. In French-speaking Switzerland, to have "the American eye" meant to be avaricious. America was rendered in some songs as *Misery-ca*, a land of bad luck. Departure ceremonies in Ireland were called an "American wake" because most who emigrated were never seen again. The Japanese had a nickname for their country's emigrants to America: *kimin*, meaning the discarded.

In the Italian Piedmont, an American was a stranger to be wary of. To commit an *americanata* was to act in an eccentric or tasteless manner. In Umbria, an *amerikanu* was a spendthrift, most likely a reference to free-spending immigrants who returned with money in their pockets. One in three immigrants eventually turned around and came home. When the U.S. government began keeping records in 1908, return immigration rates were about 70 percent for people from the Balkans, 58 percent for Italians, 22 percent for Germans, and 12 percent for the British.

Although there is evidence in surviving letters that some immigrants spoke of their new land as a haven of religious freedom, Puritan John Winthrop's vision of America (famously quoted by Ronald Reagan) as a shining city upon a hill was only a small part of the Europeans' image of the continent. Immigration research shows that most immigrants came to America in search not of liberty, but work. Even most of the Puritans were seeking economic betterment, not primarily religious freedom, Friedman says.

European idioms about the upstart nation were extensive and varied, envious and contemptuous. "The vernacular has no monopoly on truth," Friedman says. But the traces of meaning that are found in the everyday lives of European villagers can serve as a corrective to platitudes, such as the one asserting that 30 million immigrants all voted with their feet for freedom and liberty.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Monster Math

THE SOURCE: "The Future of Proof" by Ian Stewart, in ***Prospect***, March 2007.

When Johannes Kepler's inquiry into the structure of snowflakes led him in 1611 to propose the most efficient method for stacking items in three dimensions, little did he guess that nearly 400 years would pass before his solution would be proven—nor that the proof, by mathematician Thomas Hales, would be about as long as 10,000 full-length novels. It would take "about 30 years merely to read it," according to mathematician Ian Stewart. Not only are computers needed to create such monster proofs, Stewart says, but only computers can verify them. And that calls into question the very nature of mathematical proofs.

Ever since Euclid of Alexandria invented proofs in the third century BC, most people have gotten their introduction to them in geometry class. Later mathematicians followed Euclid's method of writing down proofs so that others could verify their work. There was "an unspoken assumption that the verification